



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON INVASIVE SPECIES

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GARLIC MUSTARD INVADING WISCONSIN'S WOODLANDS

MADISON – While walking through your favorite oak woods this spring, you might perceive some changes: Where are the wild geraniums and red trillium this year? What are all those whitish dead, branching stalks everywhere? Why is there an ocean of small rosettes of plants with round leaves and scalloped edges? Reach down and pluck a leaf, crush it in your hand and smell it. Does it smell like garlic? If so, your detective work is finished: you've discovered garlic mustard, an invasive plant that was originally brought here by settlers as a garden herb. "Garlic mustard is a major threat to the survival of Wisconsin's woodland plants and the wildlife that depend on them," says Kelly Kearns, DNR plant conservationist. "It quickly dominates the forest floor and can displace most native wildflower species and tree seedlings within 5 years." Garlic mustard is currently invading forests throughout southern and eastern Wisconsin. Although it is not as widespread in Northern Wisconsin forests, it certainly can thrive and spread there as well, putting forests throughout the state at risk.

Also known by the scientific name of Alliaria petiolata, garlic mustard is a biennial herb that ranges from 2 to 40 inches in height as an adult flowering plant. Second-year plants generally produce one or two flowering stems with numerous white flowers that have four separate petals. In most areas of southern Wisconsin, the flower stalks are just developing and the first flowers are opening in late April/early May. "Garlic mustard can easily be recognized at this time of year because of its lush basal leaves and because it is the only plant of its height in forests that produces white flowers in the spring," Kearns says. By mid-June the flowers have developed seed pods that disperse hundreds of seeds per plant. Seeds are often spread on animal fur and by human foot traffic.

Landowners need to get an early start on controlling garlic mustard. Hand-pulling is the easiest and most effective way to control new or small populations. Make sure that you pull up the entire root! If any flowers have begun to open, remove the plants from the woods; otherwise, the uprooted plants can still develop seeds. Pulled plants can be dried and burned or buried. Composting may not kill the seeds, so compost containing garlic mustard

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should be used with caution! Although garden waste is not usually allowed in landfills, there is a temporary exception for garlic mustard plants with seeds. Just label the bags (Garlic Mustard – Invasive Plant Approved for Landfilling)

Larger populations can be managed with a combination of handpulling, herbicide and fire. Prescribed fires in oak forests can kill rosettes and seedlings, but may result in a flush of new seedlings that develop and will need to be controlled. Landowners should not burn without proper training, equipment and permits! Use of fire with a high BTU propane torch with a long wand applicator is also effective, but should be done only if there is no chance of the fire spreading (ideally after a rain or when the ground and leaves are moist). Herbicides such as glyphosate or 2,4-D are effective in killing basal rosettes if done in early spring, prior to native wildflowers emerging, or in the fall when rosettes are still active. Garlic mustard seeds can remain viable in the soil for 7–10 years, so any control effort must be monitored and repeated for many years. Wooded sites without garlic mustard should be inspected every year.

For more information on garlic mustard, including photos, see the WI-DNR website: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/invasive/factsheets/garlic.htm>. Brochures on garlic mustard may be available at your local University of Wisconsin Extension office.

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